

till we have faces a myth retold

****Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold****

till we have faces a myth retold is not just a phrase but an invitation to dive deep into a literary masterpiece that reimagines ancient myth through a modern lens. C.S. Lewis's novel **Till We Have Faces** stands apart as a profound retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, exploring themes of love, identity, faith, and human nature. It's a story that resonates far beyond its mythological origins, offering readers layers of meaning to unpack with every page.

Understanding the Core of Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold

At its heart, **Till We Have Faces** is a retelling of the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche, but Lewis doesn't simply recount the legend—he transforms it. The novel is told from the perspective of Psyche's sister, Orual, whose jealousy, love, and eventual self-awareness provide a fresh and emotionally complex viewpoint. This approach allows readers to explore the myth with a nuanced understanding of human flaws and divine mysteries.

The Myth of Cupid and Psyche Revisited

The original myth revolves around Psyche, a mortal woman of extraordinary beauty, and Cupid, the god of love. Psyche's story is one of trials, transformation, and ultimate reunion with love. Lewis's retelling keeps the myth's core intact but focuses on Orual, who struggles with her feelings of possessiveness and bitterness, ultimately revealing the human side of divine tales.

This shift in perspective is a critical element that makes **Till We Have Faces** a myth retold rather than a simple reproduction. It invites readers to question the nature of love and the masks people

wear—both metaphorically and literally.

Thematic Depth in Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold

One of the reasons the novel remains relevant and compelling is the rich thematic content Lewis weaves into the narrative. It's not just a mythological retelling but a profound exploration of human experiences.

Love and Jealousy

Love, in Lewis's narrative, is multifaceted. Orual's love for her sister is intense but complicated by jealousy and selfishness. This portrayal challenges the idealized versions of love often found in myths, showing how love can be flawed and painful. The tension between Orual's love and jealousy drives much of the story's emotional depth.

Identity and Self-Discovery

The title **Till We Have Faces** itself hints at the journey of self-recognition. Orual's "face" symbolizes not just physical appearance but her true self—one she must confront and accept. The novel suggests that understanding oneself fully is a prerequisite for genuine love and connection with the divine.

Faith and the Divine

The relationship between mortals and gods in the story is complex and often ambiguous. Lewis explores how faith can be intertwined with doubt and misunderstanding. Orual's struggles with the gods reflect a universal human experience—seeking meaning and justice in a world governed by forces

beyond comprehension.

C.S. Lewis's Narrative Style and Its Impact

Lewis's storytelling in **Till We Have Faces** is notable for its lyrical prose and psychological insight. The first-person narrative creates an intimate connection between Orual and the reader, allowing us to experience her inner turmoil and growth.

Language and Symbolism

The novel is rich in symbolism—faces, masks, and visions all serve as metaphors for identity, truth, and perception. Lewis's poetic language enhances the mythic quality while grounding it in emotional reality.

Character Development

Orual's character arc is the centerpiece of the story. From a bitter, insecure princess to a woman who confronts her own limitations and desires, Orual's transformation is both tragic and redemptive. This depth of characterization is what elevates **Till We Have Faces** beyond a simple myth retelling into a profound psychological study.

Why Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold Matters Today

In a world saturated with adaptations of myths and fairy tales, Lewis's novel stands out because of its emotional honesty and philosophical depth. It speaks to anyone grappling with questions of love, identity, and spirituality.

- **Rediscovering Classic Myths:** The novel encourages readers to revisit ancient stories with fresh eyes, understanding their timeless human truths.
- **Exploring Complex Characters:** Unlike traditional myths that often portray gods and mortals in black-and-white terms, this retelling embraces complexity and ambiguity.
- **Engaging with Universal Themes:** Themes like jealousy, faith, and self-acceptance are as relevant today as they were centuries ago.

Reading Tips for Engaging with *Till We Have Faces*

If you're new to Lewis's work or to mythological retellings, here are some tips to deepen your appreciation of the novel:

1. **Familiarize Yourself with the Original Myth:** Understanding the basic story of Cupid and Psyche enhances the impact of Lewis's reinterpretation.
2. **Pay Attention to Orual's Perspective:** Her voice shapes the narrative and provides insight into the novel's themes of perception and truth.
3. **Reflect on the Symbolism:** Consider what "faces" and "masks" represent in your own life, making the story personally meaningful.
4. **Discuss and Share:** Talking about the novel with others can open up new interpretations and deepen your understanding.

The Legacy of *Till We Have Faces* in Literature

Since its publication in 1956, *Till We Have Faces* has gained acclaim not only among fans of fantasy and mythology but also in academic circles. It's often studied for its innovative narrative technique and philosophical depth.

Influence on Myth Retellings

Lewis's novel paved the way for more introspective and character-driven mythological retellings. Writers today continue to draw inspiration from his approach—focusing on human emotions and internal conflicts rather than just external adventures.

Impact on C.S. Lewis's Reputation

While Lewis is best known for *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Till We Have Faces* is frequently cited as his most mature and sophisticated work. It reveals a different side of the author, highlighting his ability to engage with complex theological and psychological questions.

Exploring *Till We Have Faces: a myth retold* opens a doorway not only to ancient stories but also to timeless questions about what it means to be human. It invites readers into a world where myth and reality intertwine, where faces are not just seen but understood, and where the journey toward self-discovery is as compelling as any epic adventure.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold'?

The central theme is the exploration of love, faith, and the nature of the self, retelling the myth of Cupid and Psyche from a psychological and philosophical perspective.

Who is the author of 'Till We Have Faces' and what is the significance of the retelling?

C.S. Lewis is the author, and the retelling is significant because it presents the myth from the viewpoint of Psyche's sister, offering a fresh and introspective perspective on the classic story.

How does 'Till We Have Faces' differ from the original myth of Cupid and Psyche?

The novel shifts the narrative focus to Orual, Psyche's sister, providing a deeper psychological and emotional exploration, and addressing themes of jealousy, love, and self-understanding not emphasized in the original myth.

What role does Orual play in the story 'Till We Have Faces'?

Orual is the protagonist and narrator, whose complex emotions and inner struggles drive the story, as she grapples with love, jealousy, and her relationship with the divine.

How does C.S. Lewis incorporate mythology into 'Till We Have Faces'?

Lewis uses the ancient Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche as a foundation but reimagines it with rich character development and philosophical inquiries, blending myth with psychological and spiritual themes.

What is the significance of the title 'Till We Have Faces'?

The title suggests the idea of truly seeing and understanding oneself and others, implying that only when we have 'faces'—true identities and self-awareness—can we fully experience love and the divine.

In what ways does 'Till We Have Faces' explore the concept of faith?

The novel examines faith through Orual's struggles to comprehend the gods and her own beliefs, highlighting doubts, misunderstandings, and the journey toward spiritual insight.

Why is 'Till We Have Faces' considered a classic in modern myth retellings?

It is praised for its profound psychological depth, literary craftsmanship, and innovative perspective, making it a timeless and influential reinterpretation of myth.

What lessons can readers learn from 'Till We Have Faces'?

Readers can learn about the complexities of human emotions, the importance of self-awareness, the nature of love and sacrifice, and the challenges of faith and understanding the divine.

Additional Resources

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold – An Analytical Review

till we have faces a myth retold is more than just a retelling of an ancient story; it is a profound exploration of human nature, identity, and the complexities of faith. C.S. Lewis's novel, first published in 1956, reimagines the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche through a mature, introspective lens that challenges traditional interpretations. As a myth retold, the book stands out for its psychological depth and philosophical undertones, inviting readers to reconsider the nature of love, sacrifice, and personal transformation.

This article delves into the narrative structure, thematic elements, and cultural significance of "Till We Have Faces," situating it within the broader context of myth retellings and literary adaptations. By examining the novel's unique approach to the Cupid and Psyche myth, this review sheds light on why Lewis's work remains relevant and compelling for contemporary audiences.

Reimagining a Classic Myth

At its core, "Till We Have Faces" revisits the ancient Greco-Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche, a tale traditionally centered around themes of desire, trust, and redemption. However, Lewis's version diverges significantly by shifting the narrative perspective to Orual, Psyche's sister, who is often portrayed as a tragic and complex figure. This narrative choice transforms the myth into a study of jealousy, self-deception, and the human struggle for understanding the divine.

Unlike many myth retellings that preserve the mythical tone and style, Lewis grounds the story in a pseudo-historical setting, blending myth with a realistic portrayal of human emotions and societal dynamics. This hybrid approach enriches the myth, making it accessible and relatable without sacrificing its symbolic power.

The Role of Orual: A New Protagonist

One of the most significant features of "Till We Have Faces" as a myth retold is its focus on Orual. Traditionally a peripheral character, Orual is given a voice and agency, which allows readers to engage with the myth from an unprecedented angle. Her internal conflict, her bitterness toward the gods, and her eventual journey toward self-awareness form the emotional backbone of the novel.

Orual's transformation challenges the reader to consider the complexities of human perception and the often painful process of coming to terms with one's flaws. Her struggle reflects broader existential questions—what does it mean to truly see oneself and others? How does one reconcile faith with doubt?

Thematic Exploration in Till We Have Faces

The myth retold in "Till We Have Faces" is rich with themes that resonate beyond the boundaries of its

ancient origins. Lewis's narrative probes deeply into the nature of love, sacrifice, and the human desire for divine connection.

Love and Jealousy

Central to the story is the tension between different forms of love—selfish love, romantic love, and unconditional love. Orual's jealousy toward Psyche is not merely sibling rivalry; it symbolizes the human tendency to possess and control what one desires. This portrayal contrasts sharply with the idealized love between Psyche and Cupid, which is portrayed as transcendent and mystical. The myth retold here questions whether true love can exist without suffering and misunderstanding.

Faith and Doubt

Another compelling aspect of Lewis's retelling is its treatment of faith. Orual's bitter accusations against the gods reveal a profound spiritual crisis. This theme is particularly relevant in the context of mid-20th-century literature, where questions of faith and doubt were prominent. The novel does not offer easy answers but instead presents faith as a complex, often painful journey.

Identity and Self-Perception

The title itself, "Till We Have Faces," hints at the novel's preoccupation with identity. Lewis explores how individuals often hide their true selves behind masks—both literal and metaphorical. Orual's physical appearance and her emotional defenses serve as barriers to genuine connection, underscoring the human need for authenticity.

Comparative Perspectives: Myth Retold in Literature

"Till We Have Faces" fits within a broader literary tradition of myth retellings, where classic stories are adapted to explore new themes or reflect contemporary concerns. Comparing Lewis's work with other myth retellings reveals its distinctive qualities.

Contrast with Traditional Retellings

Many adaptations of the Cupid and Psyche myth emphasize its romantic and fantastical elements. For instance, Apuleius's original "The Golden Ass" presents the story as a fairy tale with moral lessons. Lewis, by contrast, delves into psychological realism and philosophical inquiry, setting his work apart as a myth retold with intellectual rigor.

Similarities to Other Modern Myth Retellings

Like Madeline Miller's "Circe" or Jeanette Winterson's "Weight," Lewis's novel uses myth as a vehicle for exploring female agency and identity. However, "Till We Have Faces" predates these contemporary works by decades, marking it as a pioneering text in the genre of feminist myth retellings.

Strengths and Limitations of Till We Have Faces

Assessing the novel's strengths and limitations helps provide a balanced perspective on its place in literary and mythological discourse.

- **Strengths:** The novel's psychological depth and philosophical complexity stand out. Lewis's

prose is both elegant and accessible, making the myth retold resonate with modern readers. The narrative voice of Orual offers a fresh and compelling perspective rarely explored in myth adaptations.

- **Limitations:** Some readers may find the novel's pacing slow, especially given its introspective nature and the weighty themes it addresses. Additionally, the myth's original fairy-tale charm is subdued in favor of a more somber, reflective tone, which might not appeal to those seeking a traditional fantasy narrative.

Impact on Myth Retelling and Literary Adaptations

"Till We Have Faces" has influenced subsequent writers and scholars interested in myth retellings and the reinterpretation of classical stories. Its nuanced approach to character psychology and theology sets a benchmark for how myths can be reexamined and revitalized for new audiences.

The novel's exploration of themes such as identity and faith continues to inspire debates in literary criticism and theological studies, underscoring its enduring relevance.

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold remains a seminal work that challenges readers to look beyond surface narratives and engage with the complexities of human nature and spirituality. Through its innovative narrative perspective and thoughtful thematic exploration, it stands as a powerful example of how ancient myths can be transformed to speak to modern sensibilities.

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